

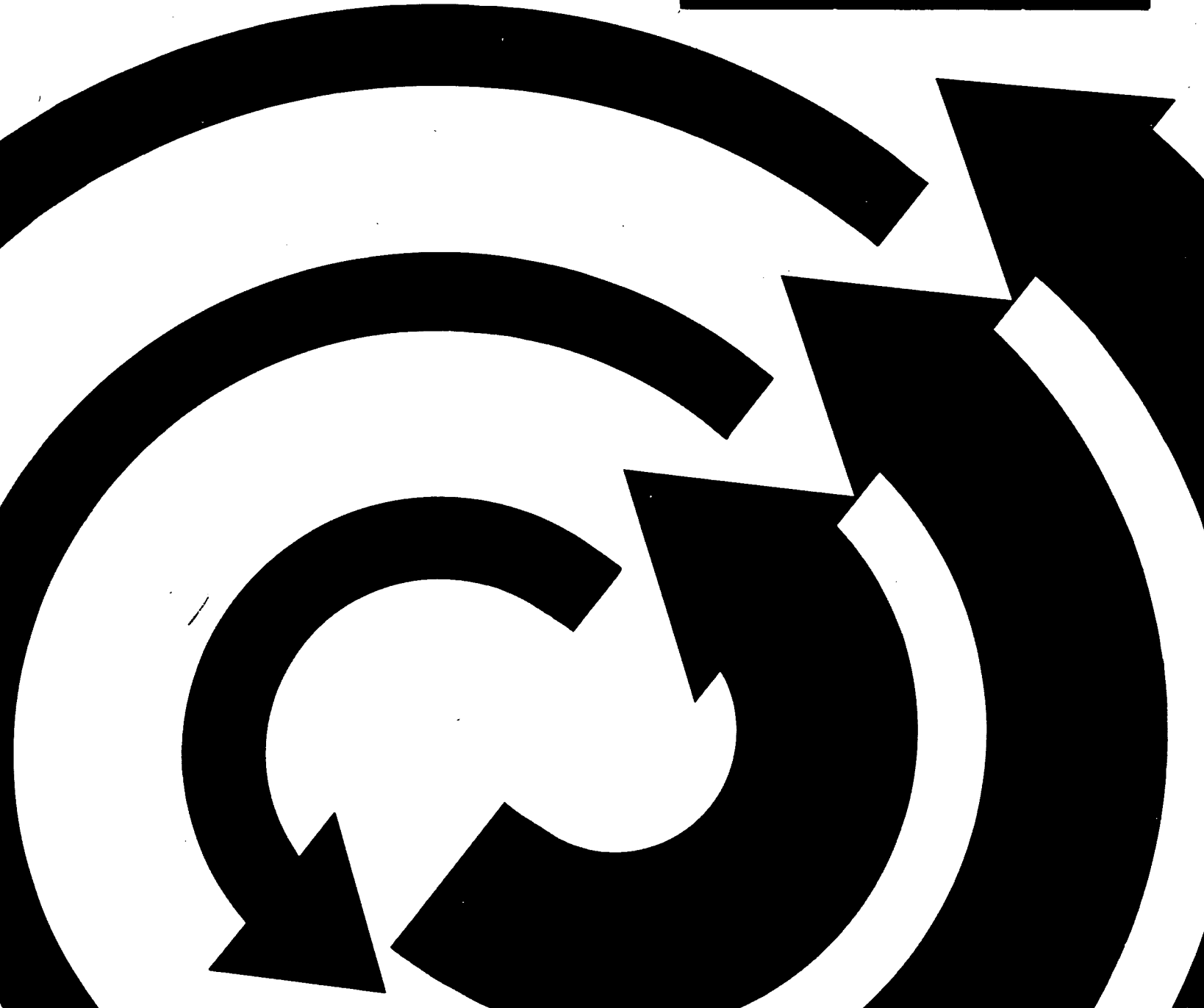
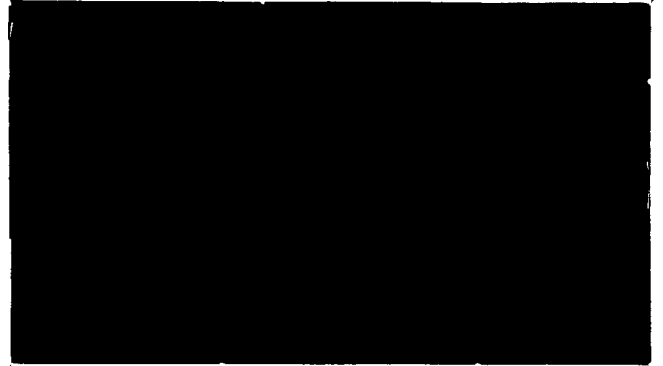


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**INTIMACY, IDENTITY AND DIGNITY:  
HUMAN NEEDS AND THE  
PRIMACY OF PRODUCTION  
IN MARXIST SOCIAL THOUGHT**

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Intimacy, Identity and Dignity: Human Needs and the  
Primacy of Production in Marxist Social Thought\*

by

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## A B S T R A C T

### Intimacy, Identity and Dignity: Human Needs and the Primacy of Production in Marxist Social Thought

The primacy assigned material production in orthodox Marxist thought has excluded human action based on needs for intimacy and sexuality, identity and culture, and dignity and meaning, and limited Marxism's capacity to account for the crisis of socialism and the rise of new social movements. These human needs may be subsumed by capitalism, but they may also exist independent of capitalism or interact with it to create movements of resistance, reorganize relations of production, or structure its symbolic assumptions. Interactions between human needs and capitalism are evident in movements of sexual, gender, ethnic and religious liberation and in the effects of race, gender and culture on the organization of capitalism itself. Marxism must be reconstructed to include human needs for intimacy, identity and dignity if it is to account for these new movements or even for the historical development of capitalism.

Just as Darwin discovered the law of development of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history: the simple fact, hitherto concealed by an overgrowth of ideology, that mankind must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing, before it can pursue, politics, science, art, religion . . ."

Engels's speech at Marx's grave, 17 March 1883

This "simple fact," the primacy of material production, was, according to Engels, one of Marx's two greatest discoveries. The primacy of production, expressed programmatically in the *Preface to A Critique of Political Economy*, was the foundation for Marx's theory of historical materialism as well as for what was, according to Engels, his second great discovery, the laws of motion of capitalism itself. Most expositions of orthodox Marxist thought begin, like Engels, with the primacy of material production as Marxism's fundamental principle (Kautsky [1891] 1971; Bukharin ([1922] 1969; Cohen 1978; Giddens 1981; Wright, Levine and Sober 1992). Reexamination of this and other basic principles of Marxism has become an increasingly urgent task with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the stagnation of European social democracy, and the rise of social movements based on every conceivable human grouping except those defined by the organization of production. In a recent article the sociological Marxist Michael Burawoy (1990, p. 779) sets out to discover "what then lies at the core of Marxism? What is it that Marxists cling to at all costs and abandon only when they become ex-Marxists?" and concludes, like Engels and many others, that the primacy of production is at the core.

Burawoy outlines seven basic postulates of Marxism--all derived from the *Preface* and all based on the primacy of production. His first and most basic postulate (P1) is a restatement of Engels based on a quote from the preface (in italics). "For there to be history, men and women must transform nature into means of their survival, that is they must *produce* [italics in original] the means of their existence. '*In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of the development of the productive forces*'" (1990, p. 780). Burawoy's other

postulates on base-superstructure, forces and relations, fettering, class struggle and revolution all flow from this fundamental postulate. He goes on to argue that Marxism is a scientific research program, not an ideology, because it has responded to anomalies by creating new concepts from Trotsky's "combined and uneven development" to Gramsci's "hegemony" to extend and deepen the theory while maintaining the integrity of the core postulates. Marxism's "core" emerges, if not triumphant, at least undefeated, despite socialist collapse, social democratic stagnation and new social movement proliferation. Its fundamental postulates are resilient enough to withstand all the anomalies Burawoy lists.

Burawoy's list is, however, too short. The accumulated anomalies and exceptions to the basic postulates of Marxism, including but not limited to Burawoy's "P1" or Engels's "simple fact," are actually much more numerous. As Immanuel Wallerstein (1991, p. 160) notes ". . . Marxists were ceaselessly explaining or explaining away, the role of (the very existence of) nationalities, peasants, minorities, women and the whole peripheral zone. How much ink has been spilled--and blood--over Marxism and the national question; Marxism and the peasant question, Marxism and the woman question! Nine-tenths of the world became "questions" "anomalies," "survivals" . . ." Indeed as anti-systemic challenges based on religious fundamentalism, resurgent nationalism, ethnic identity, sexual orientation, gender, ecological consciousness, liberation theology, and post modern culture threaten the very foundations of the capitalist system the proletariat of the industrial world remains the uniquely quiescent class. These anomalies pose a fundamental challenge to the basic postulates of Marxism, not simply to their theoretical elaboration.

It is the contention of this paper that these anomalies cannot be accounted for within the limits imposed by the production primacy postulate. Only a relaxation of this postulate to permit consideration of human needs other than material needs can provide an explanation of these cascading anomalies and multiplying social movements. The basic postulate forces Marxism to ignore the growing number of social movements and social issues arising from points other than the point of production, excludes a large range of human experience and motivation and imposes a productionist bias on the theoretical project as a whole. If abandoning a strict interpretation of the

production postulate makes one an "ex-Marxist" then all social scientific Marxists should become ex- or, possibly, post-Marxists. But no such retreat is necessary. Abandonment of P1 is not a rejection of Marxist social science, but a necessary condition for its successful reconstruction. An alternative starting point for such a reconstructed Marxism, based on an expanded notion of human needs, is to be found in the writings of Marx himself.

#### THE YOUNG MARX, "SOCIALISM WITH A HUMAN FACE," AND "SPECIES-BEING"

As David McClellan (1973, p. 116) observed the basic starting point for anyone interested in "socialism with a human face" is the second of Marx's four *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844. The *Manuscripts*, first published in Moscow in 1932, have influenced many attempts to construct alternative Marxisms including those of Lukács, Marcuse, Sartre, Fromm and even, in negation, Louis Althusser (Anderson, 1976, pp. 50-52; Fromm [1961] 1992). In the second manuscript Marx writing as a young man of 25 or 26 for the first time outlines his idea of "communism." In light of what the term has subsequently come to mean it is well to return to his original definition: "Communism is . . . the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man. . . . This is communism as the complete and conscious return of man--conserving all the riches of previous development for man himself as a social, i.e. human being. Communism as completed naturalism is humanism and as completed humanism is naturalism" ([1844] 1971, p. 148).

Only Communism would restore humans to their true "species-being" or fundamental humanity. Marx argued that species-being was revealed most clearly in an intimate relationship between a man and a woman, "the most natural relationship of human being to human being," which he contrasted with the degradation of sexual objectification. From such an intimate human relationship, "the whole cultural level of man can be judged," and such a relationship ". . . also shows how far the need of man has become a human need, how far his fellow men as men have become a need, how far in his most individual existence he is at the same time a communal being" ([1844] 1971, p. 147). There is no reason of course that this sentiment need be limited to the male's perception of a heterosexual relationship as expressed in the customary language of

nineteenth century social thought. The point is that intimate human relationships with full appreciation of the other person define the essence of human needs and that the expression of human needs thus defined is the goal of Communism.

Inherent in Marx's conception of "species-being" was a complete expression of the human senses, not simply physical senses but "spiritual senses" including the practical senses of "desiring and loving." Only through such complete development of the senses would humans overcome their alienation from nature, themselves and others and achieve a sense of common humanity. It is this definition of human essence that is the starting point of all Marx's subsequent analyses. This humanist vision of the young Marx owes as much to Heine and Schiller as it does to Hegelian dialectics.

This humanist vision was, of course, the beginning, not the end, of Marx's endeavors and years of "wading through the economic filth" produced a theory, not of human species-being, but of comprehensive political economy. The primacy of economics is already evident in the *Manuscripts*. The omitted phrase represented by the ellipsis in the first quotation above, for example, says that Communism is also ". . . the positive abolition of private property and thus of human self alienation," as if the former could automatically summon up the latter. Even in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* Marx did not doubt the primacy of production or the validity of the basic postulate as he was later to express it in the *Preface*. Human species-being may have been the goal but liberation from the tyranny of capitalist productive relations was the only means to attain it.

#### BEYOND THE PRODUCTION POSTULATE:

#### HUMAN NEEDS FOR INTIMACY, IDENTITY AND DIGNITY

The writings of the young Marx do, however, provide a starting point for a reconsideration of the primacy of production. The idea of "species-being" itself suggests that human beings have fundamental needs that must be satisfied before they can enter into productive relations to satisfy basic material needs. Indeed the denial of these needs under capitalism is the core of the young



Marx's argument in favor of communism. These needs, like the material needs expressed in productive relations, are socially organized and channeled but are fundamental to human social life in all societies. To mention the most important immediately indicates the empirical and theoretical limitations of the production postulate. Intimacy, identity and dignity do not exhaust the list of human needs left out of classical Marxism but these categories include a large range of human experience addressed by the young Marx of the *Manuscripts* but excluded by the primacy of production.

### *Intimacy and Sexuality*

Nurturance and emotional support for the human infant and child are obvious and indispensable prerequisites for any form of human activity economic or otherwise. They are direct consequences of the long period of physical and emotional dependence unique to the human species. That these functions have long been assigned to women has no doubt obscured their importance to males, Marxist and non-Marxist alike, and insistence on their centrality in social life is clearly reflected in contemporary feminist scholarship (Chodorow 1978; Jagger 1988; Hart 1991-92; Luker 1984). It is clear that these experiences deeply shape the human capacity for love, sexuality and intimacy and the unconscious impulses that, in turn, shape adult personality and culture. Given the prominence of these themes in psychoanalytic thought from Freud and Jung to Reich and Lacan it is remarkable that an insistence of the primacy of production can be maintained at all in Marxist thought. Human beings have sexual identities before they can decide what kind of clothing to wear, they require emotional as much or more than physical shelter and they must dream before they can create art, science or even the instruments of production.

Although human needs for nurturance, intimacy and sexuality are based in the biological facts of human reproduction and maturation they are expressed in the socially constructed forms of gender, kinship and sexual orientation. Just as material needs are expressed in the social relations of production, affective needs are expressed in the social relations of reproduction. In contemporary feminist thought these relations have been expressed in concepts such as "sex/gender systems," (Rubin 1975), "desiring production," (Deleuze and Guattari 1977) or "sex

affective production" (Ferguson 1989) that emphasize the autonomy of both affective needs and the social relations of reproduction. As MacKinnon (1989, p. 3) notes "sexuality is to feminism what work is to marxism [sic]."

Although the Marx of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* did regard intimate relationships as an indication of the general level of human development, the mature Marx, as Bertell Ollman (1979, p.159, 169) notes, never developed a theory of sexual alienation and adds "the only power whose influence is examined in detail [by Marx] is work." Although Engels in the *Origin of the Family Private Property and the State* ([1884] 1972, p. 71) did include "reproduction" as well as "production" as "determining" factors in history, this assertion is often regarded by orthodox Marxists as a deviation from the primacy of production (Ollman 1979, p. 168). Only the Freudian left (Jacoby 1983; Robinson 1969), notably Marcuse and Reich, took human needs for intimacy and sexuality and childhood nurturance seriously as autonomous forces in human social life. Most Marxists as Sartre (1963, p. 62) noted, seemed to have forgotten their own childhoods, "reading them, one would believe that we are born at the age we earn our first wages."

Although these psychological needs were among the principal preoccupations of the Frankfurt school, this tradition stressed the reification and commodification of sexual, emotional, and affective needs and the penetration of capitalism into art, science, culture and the unconscious (Anderson 1976, pp. 57-58; Slater 1977, p. 95, 117-118, 122-125). The Marcuse of *Eros and Civilization* ([1955] 1974) is an exception in asserting the primacy of sexuality and the unconscious and the emancipatory potential of their unrepressed expression. The Marcuse of *One Dimensional Man* (1964) is more representative of Frankfurt school thinking when he emphasizes the domination of capitalism over the unconscious and the "repressive de-sublimation" of commercialized sexuality. For Horkheimer and Adorno in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* ([1947] 1972) human affective needs become objects of "mass deception" created and manipulated by a "culture industry" that served equally both Fascism and monopoly capitalism.

The Frankfurt school began with a rejection of P1 economism and an insistence on the primacy of culture, art and the unconscious. In the process of developing a devastating critique of capitalist mass culture, however, the Frankfurt school provided a powerful demonstration of the power of both capitalism and the basic postulate. Not only are relations of production independent of human will; they create or subsume human desire and volition. Marcuse's "One Dimensional Man" and Adorno's "Authoritarian Personality" are the end products of the domination of the economic and political forms of capitalism over human personality. They are the psychological expression of the primacy of production over human species-being.

The current helplessness of Marxist theory and practice in dealing with feminism, particularly its radical and cultural variants, gay and lesbian liberation movements, as well as the hostility of orthodox Marxism to the cultural and sexual revolution of the 1960s is a direct consequence of the basic postulates exclusion of these human emotional needs for intimacy and sexuality. Marxism provides no way to understand the emergence of movements claiming the primacy of personal sexual identity and personal emotional expression. But these needs were the defining characteristic of Marx's species-being. A restructured Marxism must recognize that these needs are at least as fundamental as material production.

### *Identity*

Before men and women can enter into productive or any other set of human relations they must share a common cultural code, common understanding of experience and objectives, and reciprocal understanding of the intentions and needs of others. The Marx of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* understood clearly that human life in isolation was a logical and empirical impossibility. Even isolated human thought requires a cultural and community context to give it meaning. The insights of social psychologists from Simmel to Mead and Cooley have clearly emphasized that self definition and meaning are given only in interaction with others. Since productive relations are, by definition, social the basic postulate already assumes a socialized human being capable of understanding and interacting with others. It does not, therefore, make these fundamental characteristics of the human condition problematic. They only

become so in situations where shared understandings, cultures, or meanings are themselves seriously in question and in such situations Marxism provides few insights.

The inability of Marxism to understand religious, nationalist and ethnic liberation movements is a direct result of the basic postulate's subsumption of the social nature of human species-being into the process of production. In fact the theory of nationalism may represent, as Tom Nairn (1981, p. 329) declares, "Marxism's greatest historical failure." Nationalism may be, as Marxists have often asserted, a form of false consciousness and an ideological tool in the hands of a state building national bourgeoisie (Connor 1984, p. 10; Low 1958, p. 53), but it is clearly much more than that. As Benedict Anderson (1991, pp. 9-10) points out the imagined communities of national identity provide a sense of shared historical fate and meaningful personal destination that generalizing ideologies from Liberalism to Marxism cannot match. There is, he notes, no Tomb to the Unknown Marxist or the Unknown Liberal but every country has its tomb to the unknown soldier who died in defense of nationality. The ubiquity and durability of ethnicity, as Anthony Smith (1987, p. 46) emphasizes, depend on the common history, culture, experience and identity that are embodied in national cultures and transcend the life of an individual. To be without such a culture is to be without prospects for political or social liberation, social intercourse, elementary human identity, or meaningful existence.

The value of an autonomous ethnic culture is a fact of human experience well understood by marginalized groups whose cultural identity has been destroyed or devalued by the expansion of North Atlantic capitalist culture. The views of Fanon ([1963] 1991), Cabral (1969, 1970) and Césaire (1972) on the cultural alienation inherent in the colonial encounter have not been systematically incorporated into Marxist thought despite the demonstrable importance of overcoming colonized consciousness as a prerequisite for revolution. Malcolm X (1965, p. 184) reached a similar understanding of the situation of black Americans, perhaps the chief victims of culturcide in the modern world. Virtually all colonized peoples have made the assertion of a common cultural identity a prerequisite for any kind of social struggle including struggles against capitalism itself (Said, 1993, pp. 191-281). A struggle for identity must necessarily precede any

struggle based on class or political organization because without a shared cultural code collective action and collective identity and solidarity are impossible.

### *Dignity*

The dignity, worth and spiritual potential of human beings are basic elements of religious systems of thought where they are expressed in notions of salvation and the sacred. The Marx of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* expressed the same idea in the concepts of species-being and its anti-thesis, alienation, the estrangement of human beings from themselves. Communism was to end alienation and to be "the genuine solution of the antagonism between man and nature and between man and man. It is the true solution of the struggle between existence and essence, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species. It is a solution to the riddle of history and knows itself to be this solution" ([1844] 1971, p. 148). The similarities between Marx's radical humanist notion of species-being and religious concepts of human dignity and spiritual potential, as well as the fundamentally religious appeal of Marxism itself, have been frequently noted (Birnbaum 1973; Fromm [1961] 1992). Indeed it is difficult to understand the willingness of Marxist revolutionaries to sacrifice their lives in pursuit of their beliefs without a recognition of the powerful spiritual appeal of Marxism itself. People do not give their lives for systems of production.

Marx, however, regarded organized religion as the ideological form of human spirituality distorted by the social relations of production and hence another form of alienation. Religion is but an attempt to resolve in consciousness those dilemmas in the human condition which cannot be resolved in reality and hence the removal of the illusory religious world becomes a necessary condition for the resolution of the injustice and suffering in the real and, presumably, material, world. "The criticism of religion is the basis for any other criticism." Nevertheless as Birnbaum (1973, p. 14) notes, "the impulses which produced religion were for Marx and Engels, profoundly human: a demand at once for dignity and consolation, for explanation and moral coherence."

But the means to accomplish the end of human alienation and the expression of human species being was, as was noted above, the abolition of private property and the primacy of production

relegated religious ideas to the superstructure. Religious ideas, however, seek answers to ultimate questions of human existence that extend beyond the world of work and fulfill needs for moral coherence and spiritual community that exist independent of the satisfaction of material needs. Hence the remarkable persistence and even intensification of religion and religious movements in the contemporary world despite modernist predictions of their demise (Aronowitz 1990, pp. 156-161). The autonomy of the religious search for the meaning of human life is a fundamental to Weberian and phenomenological approaches to religion (Parsons 1963; Berger 1967; Luckman 1967) although, as Birnbaum (1973, p. 34) notes, nothing in this idea of religion distinguishes systems of meaning which contribute to maintaining alienation and those that do not. Although religion may be and often is the distorted expression of real material deprivation and exploitation it is also more than that. The search for dignity and meaning in human life transcends considerations of material production.

The Marxist basic postulate ignores or subsumes into production all three of these fundamental features of the human condition--the need for sexuality and intimacy, the social and cultural definition of the self, and the striving for human dignity and self expression. As Cornel West (1991, p. xxvii) has observed "the Marxist tradition is silent about the existential meaning of death, suffering, love and friendship owing to its preoccupation with improving the social circumstances under which people pursue love, revel in friendship, and confront death." Improving these social circumstances according to the implications of the basic postulates means fundamentally changing the organization of production to eliminate private property. But this solution provides no real answer to how these needs will be fulfilled in theory or in practice. These failings of Marxism have long been obvious to those engaged in the politics of sexuality, identity, or human rights and have led to the rejection of the "privileging" of productive relations and attempts to build sociologies and projects of human liberation based instead on the privileging of gender, race, or politics (Cohen 1985; Melucci 1989; Steinmetz 1992).

Although in theory it may be possible to construct a comprehensive theory of social life based on the privileging of gender, ethnicity or politics or even the denial of any special privileging

(Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Bowles and Gintis 1986), in practice these efforts have failed to go much beyond an exploration of the particular basis of oppression in question. Efforts to construct a feminist sociology or even epistemology based on the standpoint of women (Harding 1987; Hartsock 1987; Smith 1990) are still in the preliminary stages and have not as yet developed a comprehensive sociology. Similarly, Afrocentric (Asante 1988; Keto 1989; Collins 1991), "indigenous" (Morris 1984) and other ethnic standpoint theories have served to undermine limited Eurocentric notions of minority experience but have as yet provided no general theory of society. Marxism, whatever its failings, offered just such a general theory even if, as is argued here, it was based on a flawed basic postulate. Furthermore it is unclear how any theory that ignores the fundamental economic structures of capitalism would account for the overall structure of modern society in which other forms of oppression such as race and gender are now deeply embedded. We are then left with the paradoxical conclusion that the basic postulate of Marxism is both untenable and indispensable.

A reconstruction of Marxism requires the resolution of this apparent paradox. The alternate bases of human social life and social organization must be included in the theory without losing sight of the powerful insights provided by the simplifying (although inaccurate) assumptions of P1. Obviously this is the labor of a generation and this essay does not intend to do more than simply raise the question and make some preliminary suggestions for directions that Marxist social science might proceed. It also keeps open the possibility that in the end the accumulated anomalies may overwhelm the theory and cause its abandonment. But this is not the position taken here.

#### HUMAN NEEDS AND CAPITALISM: THE FUNDAMENTAL CONTRADICTION

In the Introduction to the first volume of his monumental *Civilization and Capitalism* Fernand Braudel (1981, pp. 23-24) divides the world of economic activity into three zones. The most frequently written about is "the brightly lit" world of the market economy, the transparent, visible realities of production, exchange and the market itself. This is the world of classical and neo-classical economics. But above this world is the shadowy realm of the great merchant princes of

high capitalism whose decisions send shock waves through the transcontinental trading networks they control and set in motion market forces half a world away. Although Marxism, like classical political economy from which it is derived, stresses the visible world of production and markets, its greatest achievement was to shine a bright light on the shadowy world of high capitalism and reveal its fundamental dynamics. But below the market economy, according to Braudel, is another shadowy world, the rich zone of the material structures of everyday life that sets limits for the higher realms and functions according to its own laws and dynamics.

Like Braudel's material structures of everyday life, the social processes for the satisfaction of basic human needs exist as a shadowy world almost invisible in both classical political economy and Marxism. Nevertheless the structures of everyday life organized around the expression of human needs for intimacy, identity and dignity obey their own laws and dynamics and, like the material structures of everyday life, interact with and influence the higher realms of the capitalist economy. The connections between the structures of human needs and high capitalism and the market economy, like the needs themselves, have not been a central focus of Marxism. Without a consideration of human needs there will not be much of a future for Marxism, but without Marxism's analysis of capitalism it would not be possible to examine the interaction between capitalism and human needs. There are at least five ways in which such interactions take place, only one of which (the last) has received much attention in Marxist theory:

1. These needs are relatively autonomous of capitalism and function according to their own laws and dynamics.
2. These needs generate movements of resistance that can lead to fundamental changes in capitalism.
3. These needs directly influence capitalist relations of production and channel their specific historical forms.
4. These needs (or their denial) have been incorporated into the deep structure of capitalism and determine its implicit symbolic assumptions.



5. Capitalism has subsumed many of these needs into itself through processes of commodification and commercialization.

These relationships bear on such central questions in Marxism as the transition from feudalism to capitalism, social class and class consciousness, the causes of revolution and the nature of the socialist utopia. Each deserves more extended analysis by Marxists, but only the last has received such attention, most notably, in the writings of the Frankfurt school. Each interaction will be briefly considered here to illustrate the limitations of the production postulate and the possibilities of a reconstructed Marxism based on a more exhaustive categorization of human needs. Although the interactions may seem alternate or even mutually exclusive relationships, there is considerable evidence that all five processes are at work in capitalism.

*The autonomy of human needs*

Even though the Frankfurt school argued that the culture of capitalism penetrates far into the culture and consciousness of sub-altern groups, empirical research has consistently demonstrated that, on the contrary, vigorous independent cultures, often with strong oppositional elements, continue to exist even under high capitalism. Much apparent subordinate behavior in agrarian societies reflects nothing more than a realistic assessment of limited possibilities. Agrarian and other pre-industrial lower classes usually penetrate the dominant ideology's fabrications and actively exploit its contradictions while maintaining firmly committed to their own cultures rooted in the practical problems of everyday existence (Scott 1985, pp. 304-350). The "dominant ideology" thesis has consistently been found to be a poor predictor of working class attitudes that, on the contrary, retain significant anti-capitalist and syndicalist elements despite capitalist control of the means of both material and cultural production (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner 1980; Jackman and Jackman 1983; Mann 1970).

In the case of marginalized groups the gap between the high culture of capitalism, including its economic forms, and the cultural forms of everyday life is even more pronounced. Inner city neighborhoods have constructed an alternative economy, culture and sense of community that, while constrained and impoverished by the overall wage structure of capitalism, nevertheless

contain elements of spontaneity, community, liberation and autonomy unacknowledged in the pedestrian world of the market economy (Anderson 1990; Hall, 1978; Stack 1974) Rap music too can be viewed as an autonomous expression of the wageless sector of the post-industrial city. Even though rap has been rightly criticized for a misogyny and romanticized violence that mirror and reproduce the oppressive structures of capitalist culture, it nevertheless stresses an outlaw value system of independent male sexuality, rebellion and survival that is largely incompatible with that culture (Kelley 1992; Stephens 1992). Poor black women, under immense economic and cultural pressure, have also developed autonomous cultural forms, but here the values are community, solidarity, empowerment and nurturance (Collins 1991; Hooks, 1981; Murray 1970). These marginalized communities clearly express human needs for intimacy, identity and dignity under the most constrained physical circumstances but their powerful alternative values have been obscured, distorted, and denigrated by the persuasive racism underlying modern capitalism.

Similarly religion as an inclusive source of identity and cultural coherence is not only not losing its force under high capitalism but seems, on the contrary, to be intensifying. The revival of fundamentalist religious movements not only in Christianity but in Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism in a movement that Weigel (quoted in Huntington 1993, p. 26) has called the "unsecularization of the world" is a strong indication of autonomous human needs for existential meaning unmet under capitalist or socialist modernism. The gay liberation movement, as well as the sexual freedom movement in the 1960s, indicate the persistence of human needs for sexuality and intimacy despite the repressive conformity demanded of high capitalist property and production relations. The needs for intimacy, identity and dignity are imperatives that dictate cultural forms with or without capitalism and continually subvert the best efforts of capitalism to contain or subsume them.

#### *Resistance and human needs*

It is a persistent assumption of Marxism that revolution against capitalism will inevitably grow out of the primary contradiction between capital and labor and that only working class consciousness has revolutionary potential (Fantasia 1988, pp.13-14; Draper 1978, pp. 40-48)

Although it may be acknowledged that other groups may join revolutionary struggles the economic model of class remains the basis for revolutionary consciousness and the standard against which resistance movements are to be measured. Although Marxists may at time recognize the importance of movements with different bases of solidarity as allies in the struggle against capitalism as, for example, in Lenin's writings on National Liberation movements (Low 1958), it is clear that the goals of these movements are seen as secondary to or even diversionary from the struggle against capitalism. Any serious consideration of the historical record, however, will indicate that not only do these movements challenge non-economic bases of human oppression, they often directly challenge the assumptions and cultural forms of capitalism itself. Indeed increasingly these movements represent the principal challengers to capitalism.

Revolutionary struggles in both Nicaragua and Iran clearly drew on sources of solidarity other than proletarian class consciousness but were nonetheless anti-capitalist. In the case of Nicaragua a formal proletariat scarcely existed as such except in the minds of members of the Sandinista's "proletarian faction" (Hodges 1986, p. 214). The revolution united large sections of the urban poor, the professional middle class, including students, significant sectors of the peasantry, and even a large fraction of the bourgeoisie based on a common rejection of political tyranny and a deep seated anti-imperialist nationalism (Booth 1985; Vilas 1986, pp 46-47). Although increasing immiseration and class polarization were among the underlying causes of the revolution, class conflict was deemphasized in the national unity alliance of the successful "insurrectionist" tendency among the Sandinistas.

The core of class based support of the Iranian Islamic revolution was to be found not among either the proletariat or the peasantry but in the traditional petty bourgeois merchants of the bazaar (Abrahamian 1982, p. 533; Parsa 1989, pp. 91-125). The revolution, however, united all sectors of society in support of fundamentalist Islamic religious doctrines that explicitly rejected Marxism, even in its Islamic socialist variant, but was nonetheless anti-imperialist and, implicitly, anti-capitalist. Rejection of the West included not only rejection of the hegemonic role of the United States in the world as well as the Iranian economy, but also a rejection of modernist thought in

general and the cultural assumptions of Western capitalism in particular (Abrahamian 1982, p. 534; Arjomand 1988, p. 142-143; McDaniel 1991, p. 216). National and cultural autonomy and religious community, not proletarian or other forms of class consciousness, were the driving forces of these most recent anti-capitalist revolutions.

The challenge to the capitalist core represented by contemporary black liberation struggles in the United States similarly have little base in the proletarian class relations from which most black Americans have been increasingly excluded by enduring racism and structural changes in the American economy. Although, as Harold Cruse (1968, pp. 193-258) has persuasively argued, there is a profound ambivalence about capitalism in the black liberation struggle, elements of a pronounced anti-capitalism are to be found in the ideology of the Black Panthers (McCartney 1992; pp. 133-150), the views of the Martin Luther King of the anti-war and poor peoples' movements (Fairclough 1983), and in the contemporary inner city counter culture of rap music (Kelley 1992). Not only do the currents of community, solidarity, spontaneity and emotional expression represent a culture independent of capitalism, they can also provide a powerful source of oppositional movements. Black consciousness, like working class consciousness, can generate a strong anti-capitalism and there is no reason for privileging the one over the other. The fires of rebellion in Detroit in 1967 and South Central Los Angeles in 1992 were not lit by the proletarian vanguard or any other organized political group. But they represent, nonetheless, a profound if nihilistic rejection of the material forms and the property codes of capitalist culture (West 1993, pp. 1-20).

The powerful currents of Marxist feminism in the contemporary women's movement are not a result of proletarian class consciousness but derived instead from women's experience of male dominance as *women* not only in capitalism but also in the Marxist political left (Philipson and Hansen 1990). But an even more profound challenge comes from cultural and radical feminists who denounce the instrumentalism, competitiveness, selfishness and exploitation in capitalism and modern society generally as expressions of an underlying androcentric ideology (Jagger 1988, pp. 93-98). In fact socialist values of community, generosity, and concern for others are values

that cultural feminists have often claimed to be characteristic of women's traditional worlds (Taylor 1993, p.31). The close association between androcentric and capitalist values makes the assertion of the traditionally feminine values by cultural and radical feminists a potential source of opposition to the cultural assumptions of capitalism.

Early socialisms, dismissed by Marx and Engels as "Utopian," were much less willing to accept capitalism as an established system and much more willing to include personal emotional issues and the liberation of women as part of the socialist agenda than was later "scientific" socialism. These anti-capitalist feminist concerns largely vanished in the increasing domination of the socialist movement by skilled male workers and their unions and parties (Scott 1987, pp. 10-11; Taylor 1993, pp. 285-286). And even in the case of workers' movements issues of gender, identity and dignity may be at least as important in organized resistance by male workers as worker status *per se* (Rose 1992, p. 127).

In fact in the modern world anti-capitalist movements have been based not only on proletarian, peasant or other class standing but also on religion, nation, ethnicity and gender. Any serious consideration of these movements will indicate that the primary contradictions between the culture of capitalism and human needs for intimacy, identity and dignity are at least as important as challengers to capitalism as the internal contradiction between capital and labor narrowly defined. In fact the "workers'" movement accepts the concepts of "worker" and "capitalist" as defined by capitalist property relations even as it strives to overthrow capitalist property relations. Movements based on intimacy, identity and dignity can be much more subversive of capitalism since they challenge its fundamental concepts, assumptions and legitimacy.

But it is also well to keep in mind that not all movements based on human needs lead necessarily to socialist values, opposition to capitalism or even social reform. The ultimate beneficiaries of the Iranian revolution were the conservative mullahs around the Ayatollah Khomeini, not the Islamic socialists; nationalism can lead to justice for oppressed minorities but it can also lead to ethnic cleansing; radical feminism can easily focus opposition on biological males rather than on androcentric capitalist institutions. But workers movements also have the

potential for exclusive religious, ethnic or gender concerns rather than the revolutionary opposition to capitalism postulated in Marxist theory but rarely observed in practice. In both cases there is potential for mobilization in opposition to capitalism and there is no reason for privileging worker consciousness over human needs as sources of anti-capitalist ideology.

*Human needs and relations of production*

Capitalism, Marx claimed, will batter down all Chinese walls of resistance but its actual history shows that it is a Protean social form capable of adopting itself to a wide range of historical and cultural formations including the everyday structures for the expression of human needs. Indeed instead of Marx's battering ram a better analogy might be found in Braudel's (1981 Vol. 2, p: 594) image of capitalism as a climbing plant eventually engulfing obstacles but leaving them fundamentally unchanged. Indeed the contemporary structures of capitalism have been profoundly altered by the barriers set by human needs for intimacy, identity and dignity.

Although it is clear that capitalism makes history it does not do so under circumstances of its own choosing but under circumstances dictated by the everyday structures for the expression of human needs

The development of early capitalist class relations, for example, is inextricably bound up with the structure of family relations involving issues of sexuality, intimacy and the nurturance of children. It is reasonable to argue that the occupational structure was as fundamentally structured by the category of gender as it was by class. Processes of proto-industrialization in early capitalism clearly depended on family and gender organization (Levine 1983; Medick 1981) but so did the early factory system in the textile industry (Burawoy 1985a; Smelser 1959). The remarkable predominance of women in textiles from Lowell to Singapore to Mexico City (Burawoy 1985a; Keremitsis 1984; Salaff 1988) can be explained in conventional economic terms as a preference for cheap labor but can also be viewed as gender structuring capitalist work organization. Similarly the predominance of women in twentieth century clerical work, in conventional Marxist terms a result of the degradation of work and the cheapness of literate female labor (Braverman 1974), can as reasonably be viewed as an occupational niche organized

around the gendered concept of the office wife (Kanter 1977, pp. 89-90; Glen and Feldberg 1979, pp. 66-67). The sex segregated division of labor in the medical profession had its origins in 19th century notions of gender that regarded the scientific and instrumental orientation of men as suitable for doctors and the altruistic and nurturing values of women as suitable for nurses (Bradley 1989, pp. 194-195). Gender not only structures sociological and socialist concepts of class, it also structures the productive relations that determine class.

Race has often been viewed in Marxism as a consequence of economic relations either as an ideological justification for economic exploitation (Cox [1948] 1970, p. 330; Williams 1966), a form of false consciousness dividing the working class (Reich 1981; Bonacich 1972), or as a basis for exclusion from wage labor and the formation of a "reserve army" (Hall 1978). Race can also be understood, however, as an autonomous cultural and political force that shapes the social organization of capitalist production itself (Burawoy 1985b, Greenberg 1980; Montejano 1987; Thomas 1982). Indeed it could be argued that racism is a prerequisite for maximum capitalist accumulation since only a ethnically distinct "other" can be subjected to the extreme rigors of surplus extraction as in slave (Tomich 1987), colonial (Burawoy 1985b; Greenberg 1980) or alien labor (Montejano 1987; Thomas 1982) production systems. Similarly the post-industrial labor market in the urban United States and elsewhere increasingly depends on a racially distinct sub-proletariat exempt from customary protection of law, custom and community solidarity (Fernandez-Kelly and Garcia 1989; Soja, Morales and Wolf 1983). From slavery to sweatshops capitalism has structured itself around race as an independent and indispensable element of its workings. It is as reasonable to argue that race shaped the forms of contemporary capitalism as it is to argue that capitalism shaped racism.

#### *Human needs and symbolic structure*

Not only have the manifest structures of capitalism been structured around forms of human life organized around non material human needs, the deep and often unconscious symbolic structure of capitalism has been profoundly shaped by these needs or by the denial of these needs. Many of these assumptions are unacknowledged or unrecognized in both capitalism and in Marxist

analyses of capitalism. Some have their origins in the premodern past and remain deeply buried in the modernist present. To acknowledge their claims is to question the symbolic foundations of capitalism itself.

Perhaps the clearest example is the construction of the non-European "other" that has shaped not only capitalisms' manifest forms, such as slavery and sweat shops, but also the latent and often unconscious cultural assumptions of European imperialism (Davis 1966, pp. 446-450; Said 1978, pp. 1-3; Sanders 1978, pp. 92-122). The beginnings of the modern capitalist world economy depended not only on the economic mechanisms of merchant capitalism but on mediaeval notions of European cultural and religious identity, exclusion and expansion. The early European drive for expansion had as much to do with attempts to escape Islamic encirclement, define and defend a unified Christian community, and appropriate the cultural products of threatening superior cultures as it did with purely mercantile considerations (Hulm 1986, pp. 85-85; Jennings 1975, p. 4; Robinson 1983, pp. 116-125). The 15th century African slave trade began the transformation of mediaeval images of the "black-a-moor," the "Ethiops" and the "African" into the dehumanized cultural and, later, racial category of "negro" or "black" that sustained 400 years of slave based capitalist development (Davis 1966, pp. 446-482; Robinson 1983, p. 105; Sanders 1978, pp. 100-122). The threatening and superior civilizations of the East had entered the European consciousness through the projected European fears expressed in Orientalism long before the Opium war, Admiral Perry's black ships or even a sea route around the Cape of Good Hope (Said 1978, p. 58).

The fears and cultural longings that drove Europeans outward have long been suppressed and denied but nevertheless continue to form the cultural underpinnings of the worldwide capitalist system they helped to create. Asia as the mysterious Orient and Africa as the heart of darkness, in contrast to Europe as rationality, enlightenment and civilization, remain not simply as ideological justifications for imperialism, but as deep symbolic structures that made that economic system and its subsequent exploitation possible. The construction of the idea of the enlightened West and the projection of European fears, longings and denials onto the non- Western other has



been the work of a millennium. The kingdom of Prestor John, the harems of the Ottoman Sultans, and the savages, noble and ignoble, of the new world and the dark continent remain in the European unconscious as distorted expressions of desires for potency, sexuality and natural existence denied expression in the construct of European civilization (Davis 1966, pp. 466, 468; Hulm 1986, p. 85; Sanders 1978, pp. 112-122; Said 1978, pp. 63, 72). To acknowledge these denied longings would not only break down the binary opposition between Europe and the "other" underpinning imperial expansion but also threaten the emotional denial and ascetic rationality of the capitalist system itself.

As was noted above, the capitalist virtues of rationality, competitiveness, acquisitiveness, and instrumentalism are conventionally associated with men while the socialist values of empathy, solidarity, generosity, and nurturance are traditionally associated with women. Furthermore, the civilized cultural virtues of instrumental rationality are conventionally identified with men while the natural world of childbearing and emotion is identified with women (Ortner 1974). To argue that these images of men and women are in part the creation of capitalism may be true but it is only part of the story. Capitalism, from its premodern beginnings, was constructed by members of the European aristocratic and mercantile elite who were almost always males. The civilized virtues of capitalist culture, as well as the capitalist vices of domination and exploitation, are as evident in the diaries of Columbus as they are in the life of Andrew Carnegie. Capitalism requires men (or women) who will deny human needs for intimacy and nurturing which are in fact part of the human condition, even if they have been traditionally identified with women. Defense of conventional masculinity, surrounded as it is with profound questions of sexuality, intimacy and identity, is therefore a cultural concomitant of capitalism. We only have to consider the consequences for high capitalism of a mass outbreak of traditionally feminine virtues among its participants to understand their profoundly subversive character.

Finally, as Max Weber ([1904] 1958) has most persuasively argued, the spirit of capitalism requires asceticism, self discipline, the postponement of gratification and single minded devotion to work. These imperatives are no less demanding on workers even if imposed from above than on

capitalists on whom they are largely imposed with within. Weber's "iron cage" of capitalist rationality denied and deformed the human spirit. Needs for intimacy and emotional expression, identity and solidarity, human dignity and creative expression are simply willed away in the capitalist ethos but remain as persistent sources of discontent in capitalist civilization. The cultural revolutionaries of the 1960s (Reich 1970; Rozak 1969) were correctly perceived as a threat to capitalist and worker alike. Indeed they threatened the constructs of worker and capitalist themselves as well as the self denial and emotional repression indispensable to capitalist accumulation. The unconscious denials inherent in the spirit of capitalism are among its deepest and most vigorously defended symbolic structures. Only this fact explains the furies unleashed by the seemingly innocuous defenders of the counterculture.

Marxism has dismissed ethnic, women's and cultural liberation movements as insufficiently revolutionary because they do not challenge capitalism directly. These movements, however, challenge the deep symbolic structure of capitalism that Marxist emphasis on the labor capital contradiction inadvertently reinforces. Any serious challenge to racism, sexism and the protestant ethic would undermine the cultural and psychological assumptions of the capitalist system and hence threaten the system itself. But without some understanding of what capitalism does best--transform the material world--these movements are unlikely to succeed in creating either an alternative society or an alternative theory of society. If Marxism's greatest fault was to attack at the point of production rather than at the idea of production the cultural liberation movements' corresponding weakness was to question the idea of material production without providing any alternative theory of how the satisfaction of human material needs is organized. Human beings have to reason before they eat but, eventually, they do have to eat. A reconstructed theory of society will have to include, as did classical Marxism, some theory of the social organization of production.

#### *The subsumption of human needs*

As has already been noted, the subsumption of basic human needs for intimacy, identity and dignity by capitalism is an idea that represents an extension of the production postulate to its

logical extreme. This set of relationships between basic human needs and capitalism has already received extensive treatment not only in the work of the Frankfurt school but in the entire tradition of European Marxist thought from Lukács to Althusser that Perry Anderson (1976) has called "Western Marxism." The fundamental pessimism of this work, born of the rise of Stalinism and Fascism and the defeat of socialist movements East and West, leads to a neglect of the autonomous power of human needs and perhaps the most forceful statement of the primacy of production in the Marxist literature. Capitalism succeeds in colonizing unconsciousness as well as consciousness, artificial need creation is substituted for natural need creation, and human agency is subsumed by the ideological superstructure. Lukács's concept of "reification," Gramsci's "hegemony" and Althusser's "ideology," like Horkheimer and Adorno's "culture industry," all stress the relative power of capitalist culture over the autonomous needs of the human subject.

In fact in the culmination of these developments in Western Marxism in the work of Louis Althusser the idea of an autonomous human subject acting as an agent in history is rejected altogether as "individualist-humanist error." Althusser claims a sharp "epistemological break" between the young Marx of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and the later "scientific" Marx in order to reject both the humanism of the young Marx and human needs as a basis for the theory of historical materialism (Althusser 1970). These needs are created by the "ideological state apparatus" determined in "the final instance" by the economy. Human needs vanish into the superstructure.

As was demonstrated above, human needs for intimacy, identity and dignity continue to challenge capitalist production and capitalist ideology and therefore challenge, too, the most pessimistic conclusions of Althusser and other Western Marxists. The ideology of capitalist productive relations do, as the Western Marxists argue, profoundly influence the conscious and unconscious expression of human needs. But they do not displace these needs as bases for human action independent of capitalism. The humanism of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* therefore remains an essential starting point in the reconstruction of Marxist theory to restore those human needs lost sight of in both classical "economistic" and "Western" Marxism.

## CONCLUSIONS

Two general conclusions can be derived from this analysis of the interaction between capitalism and basic human needs. First, it suggests theoretically what has long been clear empirically that the road to socialist revolution will not proceed through the organized parties of the industrial working class of the developed world. These struggles are confined by the assumptions of capitalism and even when they succeed are likely to challenge these assumptions only under unusual circumstances. The revolutionary impulse must come from those basic human needs left out of capitalism. The revolutionary contradiction in capitalist society is not that between the cultural categories of "capital" and "labor" but between capitalism and those fundamental human needs, including the human needs of workers, that capitalism has denied, repressed and left out. It is "species-beings" not workers who need to unite even if their object is still the overthrow of capitalism

The structures of human life organized around these needs provide a rich counter-culture that continues to exist outside of and in opposition to capitalism. These cultures provide possibilities for oppositional movements precisely because they raise issues of basic human needs that cannot be satisfied by material production. These needs have shaped the manifest structures of capitalism and their mobilized expression can reshape these structures. And most basic of all, these needs and their denial have become part of the deep symbolic structure of capitalism. To demand their expression, to challenge their denial, and to deconstruct their symbolic representations is to challenge the structure of capitalism itself. To strike at racism, at sexism, at heterosexism, at scientism is to subvert capitalism at its roots. It is at least as revolutionary as anything dreamt of in the philosophy of classical Marxism.

Second, the Marxist Utopia must be reconstructed to take these needs into account and to rescue Marxism from its devotion to the "utilitarian's earthly paradise" (Thompson 1976, p. 98) of material production. The expression of intimacy, identity and dignity must be made the first not the last priority of the utopian vision. Some system of production there must be and here the

Marxist vision still has power. But a reconstructed Marxism must recognize that there can be no solidarity on the job without solidarity in the home, no brotherhood of workers without sisterhood, no workers community without including all of the peoples of the earth, and no dignity in work without dignity of the human spirit. And no utopia can come into being without the freedom to dream. Addressing these issues are the first tasks of a reconstructed Marxism.

While considering the reconstruction of a new socialist Utopia it is well to consider the fate of the old Utopian socialists displaced by the "scientific" socialism of Marx and Engels. The Utopians never lost sight of the primacy of human needs for intimacy, identity and dignity. Their New Jerusalem was as much a personal and human reconstruction as an economic one. Robert Owen's own model community, however, collapsed in bitter recriminations over divisions between the comfortable upper class life style and aspirations of its founder and the hard material realities of its working class members. There is no substitute for the primacy of human needs in Marxist social thought. But there is no avoiding the hard realities of productive relations. The recognition of these realities is, as Engels said, the enduring contribution of Marxism. But in itself it is not enough.

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